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10 November 1983

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Likely Regional Reactions to a US Retaliatory
Strike Against Extremist Shia or Iranian Targets
in Lebanon

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Moderate Arab regimes were repelled by the Marine bombing [redacted] They are concerned, however, that a US strike--particularly if it led to a US-Syrian incident--could raise regional tension, spark domestic unrest and prompt radicals to retaliate against US facilities or pro-US regimes in the area. Because of these concerns, the moderates would probably have to distance themselves publicly from a US strike. Syria would respond with rhetorical attacks on the US, although we cannot rule out the possibility that Damascus would encourage its surrogates in Lebanon to attack US targets. Those Muslim states--Libya and Iran--who support the radicals would look for ways to retaliate against US targets in Lebanon and elsewhere. [redacted]

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Syria

The Syrian response to US retaliatory strikes on non-Syrian targets is likely to be sharp words and possibly anti-aircraft artillery fire. Syria's firing on a US reconnaissance flight on 10 November probably was a signal to Washington not to attack Syrian positions. [redacted]

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We cannot rule out the possibility, however, that Assad could decide to encourage radical Shia or Iranian-sponsored terrorist activity to raise the ante on the US presence in Lebanon. Syria's numerous covert assets in Lebanon provide Assad a range of options if he elects to pursue a higher risk strategy. [redacted]

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In any case, Damascus would try to extract maximum political advantage from the strikes. Assad would seek to use the US military action to drive a wedge between Washington and the moderate Arabs. [redacted]

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Lebanon

President Gemayel's government privately will welcome a US attack on the perpetrators of the Marine bombing as a signal of US commitment to stability in Lebanon. The strike will increase the tension among Shias in Beirut's southern suburbs who already fear that they are targeted for reprisals. The radical Shia groups are unlikely to be cowed by US retaliation. Their willingness to engage in terrorist activity will be unabated.

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Egypt

Cairo would view US military action against extremist targets in Lebanon as a realization of its fear that the terrorist bombing of US Marines in Beirut would lead Washington to try to punish those responsible rather than to pursue the Reagan peace initiative of September 1982. If other moderate Arab states condemned the US action, Egypt probably would adopt at best a neutral posture and might openly criticize the US. Cairo might conclude that it thus should turn to other diplomatic options to promote a Middle East peace settlement, such as reactivating the French-Egyptian initiative in the UN.

North Africa

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The reaction to US retaliatory action among North African countries--with the exception of Libya--is likely to be restrained. As a result of their close relations with the US, Morocco and Tunisia are likely to be understanding but concerned that the use of force against fellow Arabs will generate hostile feeling toward governments with close ties to the United States. Libya almost certainly will respond with harsh words but can do little on its own against US interests other than providing additional support to its anti-US clients in Lebanon and collaborating more closely with Syria and Iran. The few US citizens who remain in Libya are there against the advice of their government and thus are unlikely targets for Libyan retribution. Algeria is the only country in the Maghreb where bilateral relations with the US might be adversely affected; Algerian leaders have predicated warmer relations with the US on the belief that Washington is making an honest effort to bring

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peace and stability to the region, and they may interpret such a move as a significant departure from that objective. [REDACTED]

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Iran

In reaction to US strikes, Tehran will move quickly to increase its Revolutionary Guard forces in Lebanon and probably would order a terrorist strike against US personnel there.

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Iran would also target US personnel and installations elsewhere for terrorist attacks, such as US Embassies, military offices, and representatives in Persian Gulf states and West Germany, France, and Austria.

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Saudi Arabia

Riyadh's response would be largely verbal if US involvement was limited. If US military activity in Lebanon were prolonged, the Saudis probably would cease mediation efforts and possibly back away from support for the Gemayel government. If a Syrian-US military confrontation developed, the Saudis would reluctantly support Syria publicly and financially.

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Iraq

Baghdad publicly would condemn the US but privately would welcome an attack on Syrian or Iranian forces. Iraq probably would delay any escalation of the war in the Gulf to avoid charges of cooperating with the US.

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